

# Infantrymen get back to basics, train with the Old Guard

Story and photos by Cpl. G. Lane Miley

**ARTA, Djibouti** – The canyon walls echoed with machine gun and mortar fire Jan. 25, as infantry Marines and U.S. Army soldiers joined forces to assault a range here during a live-fire exercise.

Weapons Platoon Marines from Task Force Betio, the force protection element for Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, conducted the exercise with Old Guard mortar men from Bravo Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Infantry Regiment, whose job is carrying out tactical missions in the region.

The Marines spent two weeks preparing for the two-day culmination event, during which they moved forward to their targets, breaching obstacles and calling on the soldiers for 81 mm mortar support along the way. The preparation phase consisted of classroom training and getting familiarized with the tactics once again because for the past three months these Marines days have been filled with alternating, eight-hour shifts at Camp Lemonier, Djibouti. Returning to the fundamentals was just what the Marines needed, the platoon sergeant said.

“One of the key points of coming out here is the small unit leadership. We have corporals standing in as section leaders for Weapons Platoon – that is a tremendous ordeal for us,” said Staff Sgt. Lemarcus L. Staley. “Some of them came in the Marine Corps with their buddies, and telling them what to do is kind of hard. But when they came out here they already knew that.”

Staley, a native of Oklahoma City, Okla., said he deployed with each member of the platoon to Iraq



(Above) Lance Cpl. William Romero fires the AT-4 after Lance Cpl. Eric Milks ensures the weapon's back-blast area is clear. (Below) First Lt. Michael J. Hodd, commander, Weapons Platoon, briefs the Marines prior to assaulting the course.

and knows what each Marine is capable of. The range here will simply serve to fine tune their technical skills.

To ensure each team is proficient in each area of the range, the platoon conducted it three times, rotating sections and assessing their performance.

After the first mortar round impacted, the first corporal led the machine gun team and sprinted across the canyon range using the small boulders that covered the canyon floor as stepping stones toward their position. Once in place, they began laying down covering fire on a simulated enemy emplacement.

“All the machine gunners have been doing great, following orders and following the same things they’ve been trained – haven’t had any problems out of them,” said Cpl. Joshua O. Miles, a machine gun section leader. “As long as they’re providing fire on target so the maneuver element can move up they’ll do fine.”

White smoke began to drift across the range as the rain of mortar rounds continued – the breach team used this concealment as they maneuvered down until simulated anti-personnel mines and a strand of concertina wire impeded their path.

At that point a young Marine carrying a grappling hook low crawled to just outside the mine’s range. He tossed the hook, clearing a path by which his team could reach the wire. Then another Marine clipped the obstruction.

Next the assault team quickly ran through the breach to a large pile of rocks on their left. From there the Marines used their vantage point to fire down on their targets. They employed everything from their service rifles and hand grenades to anti-armor weapons like the AT-4 and the shoulder-launched multipurpose assault weapon.

Before transitioning from one team to another of the range’s facets, the Pla-

toon Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Michael J. Hodd, briefed the Marines on their strong points and made note of areas that needed to be improved upon.

“The guys impressed me. We actually put everything we worked up to, to use. I’m proud of them,” said Staley.

Staley said he and Hodd gave up the reins to the small unit leadership who “performed head over heels.”

The young leaders used their time on the range to conduct night fires and mortar shoots, “from the hip,” where the mortar men must quickly adjust fire for multiple targets.

The course of events over the recent weeks reassured the platoon leaders that their men still possess strong leadership and the skills vital to combat the Global War on Terrorism. It gave the noncommissioned officers a chance to lead their men in assaulting situations and assess their Marines’ progress. It gave the young warriors some trigger time and a chance to hone their infantry skills.

“It broke up the monotony, we got some good experience today,” said Lance Cpl. Chris Hunter, whose normal day consists of standing post at Camp Lemonier.



Cpl. Edward R. Hamer crosses the breach during a combined arms, live-fire exercise.

